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Ondrej Kascak

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Communists, Humboldtians, neoliberals and dissidents: or the path to a post-communist homo oeconomicus

Ondrej Kascak[a,b]

[a]Faculty of Education, Trnava University, Trnava, Slovakia; [b]Centre for Research in Education, Slovak Academy of Sciences, Bratislava, Slovakia

ABSTRACT

The neoliberalisation of higher education in post-communist central and eastern Europe, the new EU member states, is not seen as being distinct. Implementation of the Bologna Process and Lisbon Strategy means it has become part of the competitive global sphere of higher education. The transformation of post-communist higher education has attracted little attention, but it is in fact an example of an unprecedented radical 25 year-long transformation: from centralised non-research-orientated communist policy to the radical autonomous Humboldtian environment that emerged after the fall of communism to a strong European neoliberalisation. This article highlights not only the gradual and unique nature of these processes but also shows how they have merged to form the current neoliberalist hybrid. Focusing primarily on former Czecho-Slovakia and the subsequent Slovak and Czech Republics, it details the education policy strategies and initiatives that have contributed to this process. By examining the new educational policy framework at a Slovak university, it shows how Humboldtian culture encountered neoliberal culture: a distinct feature of post-communist neoliberalisation. It is suggested that the Slovak and Czech implementation of neoliberalism has not proved immune to forms of governance similar to those found under communism; rather the two have fused together.

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Introduction

The global neoliberal transformation of the university sector and all its associated academic entities has now become an undisputed reality and the subject of many detailed studies and monographs published in recent years. The foundations of global policy and the mechanisms of neoliberalism are laid out in strategic documents (and their binding and/or non-binding recommendations) produced by supranational organisations (the OECD, WTO, WB, EU etc.); thus it acquires its global character, which is then incorporated locally into national government policies. Consequently, a monolithic and linear understanding of neoliberal transformation emerges. It casts itself as universal regardless of the cultural context. Whilst this perspective may enable us to describe and monitor political interventions or transformations in social reality, there is nonetheless a need to perceive and understand how these transformations become embedded locally, anchored into the 'recipient' environment, particularly since they significantly influence social transformations, including those within the university sector.

CONTACT Ondrej Kascak okascak@truni.sk

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Thus, we can obtain a more comprehensive view of the processes of neoliberalisation. Social scientists are therefore urging us to abandon the relatively saturated unifying global discourse on neoliberalism:

> in refusing to treat neoliberalism as an apparatus that determines all other relations of power and instead showing how distinct forms of power both recombine in different ways within different historical periods and co-exist (rather than simply replacing each other) (Brady 2014, 32)

As yet no analysis based on these principles has been undertaken of the neoliberal transformation of the university sector in post-communist countries. However, we should note the handful of studies conducted as part of the 'ethnographic turn within studies of neoliberal governmentalities' (Brady 2014, 13) that do not see the neoliberal transformation in monolithic terms and that examine communist or post-communist countries and their heritage (on Poland, see Dunn 2004; on Russia, see Collier 2011; on China, see Hoffman 2006; Kipnis 2007, 2008).

The aim of this study is to analyse the neo-liberal transformation of the Slovak university sector as part of the post-communist transformation processes and in relation to the communist past. Kwiek (2012) has also argued for the need to consider both the communist and early 1990s post-communist legacies when examining current developments in higher education in central Europe. Our analysis does not consider the neoliberalisation in Slovakia in terms of an all-determining process that replaced communist methods of governance after the fall of communism, but as a process co-existing with communist-era forms of governance and post-communist ones, and which made use of the resources and operating mechanisms of both. Whilst accession to the EU, adoption of the Lisbon strategy and the introduction of the Bologna processes all set in motion the new globalised direction of the neoliberalisation of higher education, a very particular form of neoliberal governmentality was installed that existed alongside the traditional model of governance found in post-communist countries. We describe this process using a Slovak public university as our case study and identify the specific nature of the neoliberalisation of its culture. We begin by acknowledging that neoliberalisation is not a monolithic process. It had different starting points and mechanisms and the dynamic course it followed from the mid-1990s on can be explained by a particular technological compatibility with communist and post-communist forms of governance.

Permeation of communist forms of governance

In the pre-war era, central European universities were both shaped by and organised around the ideas of Wilhelm von Humboldt. Humboldt had founded the University of Berlin in 1810 on the basis of two principles: the unity of research and study ('Einheit von Forschung und Lehre') and solitude and freedom (Humboldt 1809–1810, 229) ('Einsamkeit und Freiheit').This second principle reflected Humboldt's concern not only for autonomy and the freedom to carry out research but also that the university as an organisation should be governed by academics and not the state. The state, he argued, should adopt a humble approach to universities and not dictate the way in which knowledge is conferred nor how research should be conducted. Self-cultivation and the acquisition of knowledge should follow its own logic and not be directly connected to the outside world. This is reflected in the principle of solitude. Many universities were modelled and re-organised along Prussian-Humboldtian lines, especially those in Austria's sphere of influence, such as those in Bohemia. The Austrian education minister and graduate of Charles University in Prague, Leopold, Count of Thun und Hohenstein, had a key role to play in this. Favourably disposed to the ideals of the Czech national movement, he was responsible for implementing the German educational model in the latter half of the nineteenth century (Lentze 1962).

The Humboldtian conception of the university continued to prevail throughout the existence of Austria-Hungary and the first independent common state of the Czechs and Slovaks established in 1918 and which lasted until 1938. The communist takeover of 1948 led to a radical departure from the established notion of the university. The university sector was rebuilt top down in line with an entirely different cultural model – the Soviet communist model of higher education.

The Humboldtian notion of the unity of research and study was cast aside with the introduction of a dual-pronged system in which higher education institutions were mainly responsible for training highly educated (and ideologically reliable) workers, and as such their function was to provide education and qualifications rather than conduct research: the latter being the prerogative of the institutions belonging to the Czechoslovak Academy of Sciences, which was not part of the higher education system. In this system, the universities fulfilled a utilitarian state role and were completely subjugated to the state, and the decisions it took in the 1950s led to the suppression of academic autonomy.

Following the work of Connelly (2000), we can identify different strategic interventions into the running of the traditional Czechoslovak university in pursuit of 'the sovietisation' of higher education. Hence, '[a]cademic senates were replaced by administrative boards whose members were appointed by the state' (30). These were bureaucrats who had never performed any academic work and had no experience of higher education. The state also governed the university sector by overseeing its performance via the new normative planning documents, known as Five-Year Plans. The university faculties were divided up into departments (in Slovak, *katedry*), fragmenting the structure further. The departments were the basic and smallest organisational units to be found in the faculties, and they contained within them academics with similar foci who could be easily, directly and more effectively controlled by what were known as heads of department. A new system of 'academic evaluations' was introduced for students and academics alike. The basic criteria were ideological reliability and class origin. This led to the gradual departure or dismissal of a large number of traditional professors. Those occupying professorial posts came to be perceived as state employees both in terms of the legislation and conceptually. The status of the professor was now one of bureaucrat. This enabled a new symbolic culture to prevail within the university: Party label pins, emblems and youth organisation patches. The culture of egalitarianism and bureaucracy could be seen in the symbolic expressions found in the obligatory official university correspondence, for example, in the salutation 'Esteemed comrade' (180).

Post-communist higher education

These mechanisms operated until 1989 when, following the fall of communism, universities underwent substantial reform. The leitmotif of post-1989 political discourse was a repeated focus on research and teaching at reformed universities (Šima and Pabian 2013) and the rebuilding of a traditional Humboldtian university culture.

Given that higher education institutions had been dependent upon state doctrine up until 1989, their research function had been strongly suppressed, and this was evident in the first steps taken to introduce autonomy into the higher education sector and their almost complete removal from state influence. The 1990 Higher Education Act set out the conditions for the complete autonomy of Czechoslovak higher education institutions. Academic freedom and the autonomous governance of universities were reinstated. According to Pabian, Šima, and Kynčilová (2011, 100), this resulted in 'the near absolute power of academics over universities' which 'elevated academic interests over any other issues or interests'. At this time, there was a strengthening of a Humboldtian identity among academic staff that posited them as independent intellectuals who saw research and knowledge as being important in and of itself and who did not pursue exclusively utilitarian goals. Many staff members had been persecuted under communism (for being members of dissident movements or pupils of Jan Patočka, for instance) and after the fall of communism they returned to the universities which allowed them to fast-track as compensation for having been politically persecuted. For these people, Humboldt's ideal symbolised academic freedom and independence.

However, the post-communist transformation did not follow this model everywhere. In some areas of knowledge (mainly the humanities and social sciences), the situation was extremely complicated, making this model unachievable in practice and so a mock version was adopted. This was partly because some disciplines had been purely ideological at heart. For instance, education sciences/pedagogy had been entirely focused on communist education methods, the work of the Pioneer organisation and the *Socialist Union of Youth*. Thus, after the fall of communism a national knowledge bank on which

the discipline could have been rebuilt simply did not exist. These subject areas simply did not have a knowledge base that was independent of politics and ideology. Consequently, renewing the staff base was also problematic. For instance, academics who had been important (and politically engaged) in communist pedagogy were not completely excluded from academic life but remained in the profession, simply changing their profiles. Not infrequently, one would find academics who had, prior to the 1989 revolutions, propagated an indoctrinating pedagogy within the Pioneer organisations, and who then, immediately after 1989, changed their subject matter to cover, for instance, various alternative models of education. Thus, the communist identity did not disappear entirely; rather, it was a case of it surviving under the new conditions once the universities had been freed from state influence. Somewhat paradoxically, this very separation of state and higher education protected academics like these, providing them with a kind of public invisibility. They continued to build their university careers and, 10 or 15 years later, some could be seen competing for important academic functions or posts (some of which they still hold today). For a certain section of academic staff then, Humboldtian universities were places where they could follow their personal beliefs in complete contradistinction to what the previous notion of a university had been, while for others they offered personal security in the shape of continuity.

In 1992 these strongly autonomous universities with their heterogeneous staff began attracting criticism from the OECD which was pursuing neoliberal aims in education. In its first report, the OECD recommended encouraging businesses to provide funding for universities and to introduce a fee-paying system like the Australian *Higher Education Contribution Scheme* or a student loan system (Pabian 2007). In the years that followed, OECD criticism grew as it pointed out that conditions had fundamentally changed compared to the first half of the 1990s:

> The environment within which Czech higher education finds itself has changed fundamentally when compared to that of 1990. The priority then was to reconstruct the Czech university system in the wake of the communist era, and for which the Humboldtian university with its deep roots in the Czech past and its tradition of scientific and intellectual independence was a highly appropriate model. The priorities today are to ensure that the Czech Republic has a tertiary education system that is able to function effectively in an increasingly competitive European and international higher education area, and that contributes to development of the Czech Republic in the context of the knowledge society. (File et al. 2009, 97)

In the 1990s, higher education reforms pursued emancipatory and domestic goals that corresponded to the university concept elaborated by Humboldt and his contemporaries in the early nineteenth century. The key values were autonomy, the freedom to perform academic work and extremely limited state control of higher education. These values appealed to the Czechoslovak university sector as it responded to the sweeping post-revolutionary liberalisation trends and considerable distrust of state centrism in the first half of the 1990s. There was a general tendency in education policy to give education providers (regardless of education level) significant autonomy as is evidenced in most of the government education programmes of that era (Kascak and Pupala 2014).

It was an era in which a classical liberal discourse prevailed which could not be confused with neoliberal discourse and neoliberalisation processes.

> Whereas classical liberalism represents a negative conception of state power in that the individual was taken as an object to be freed from the interventions of the state, neoliberalism has come to represent a positive conception of the state's role in creating the appropriate market by providing the conditions, laws and institutions necessary for its operation. (Olssen and Peters 2005, 315).

The high level of autonomy afforded by the universities was the result of precisely this negative conception of state power. The OECD, however, indicated in its reports that higher education should be more reactive and responsive than autonomous and free. It was to respond to increased competition within the European higher education sector and to the context of the knowledge society. The outlook of education and graduates was therefore to differ as well:

> In classical liberalism the individual is characterized as having an autonomous human nature and can practice freedom. In neoliberalism the state seeks to create an individual that is an enterprising and competitive entrepreneur. (Olssen and Peters 2005, 315)

In post-revolutionary Czechoslovakia, the classical liberal notion of the citizen was seen as an imperative. Over the next decade (as the Czechs and Slovaks began noticeably to go their separate ways), however, neoliberal discourse began to prevail.

'Hybrid' neoliberalisation

Following the division in 1993 of Czecho-Slovakia into the Czech Republic and the Slovak Republic, the two countries began to draw on their common history and to tie themselves to membership of NATO, the OECD and EU. They were therefore ready to respond to the global discourse emanating from these organisations (Slovakia joined the OECD in 2000, and NATO and the EU in 2004). However, national policies in the two countries began to differ and, particularly after joining the OECD, the Slovak political elite tended increasingly towards stronger economic liberalism, seeking membership of the EU and entry into the eurozone (in 2009). By contrast, in the Czech Republic, a relatively significant group of politicians remained sceptical of the EU and the country pursued less dynamic economic liberalisation measures than did Slovakia. During this period 'the EU accession countries … were much more praised by the European Commission for their social reforms leading to neoliberal solutions than for reforms potentially leading to any traditional Western European social arrangements' (Kwiek 2014, 57). Slovakia's actions conformed to this EU rhetoric and so economic commentators were relatively early on able to talk of 'Slovakia's neoliberal turn' (Fisher, Gould, and Haughton 2007). The first neoliberalisation changes occurred in the late 1990s and were directed at reforming the state social support system, with the emphasis shifting from the individual's age to contributive history, to reform of the pension system in collaboration with the Hayek Foundation through part-privatisation of the pension system, to tax reform (introduction of a flat tax rate), to an amendment of the Labour Code that would enhance the rights of the employer, to health care reform (introduction of health care charges) and significant public expenditure cuts (Smith and Rochovská 2006). It should be said that these changes were accompanied by a fierce public debate on the new cultural revolution, since the reforms were devised either by graduates of universities in the UK and US or by those who operated in neoliberal economic circles (Kascak and Pupala 2014). The early twentieth-century references to Sovietisation were dropped in favour of social Americanisation.

Dominance of economic rationality

Our characterisation of the process of post-communist neoliberalisation is based on two particular symbols that reflect this process. '[T]he economization of the social' (Bröckling, Krasmann, and Lemke 2011, 25) is typical of the neoliberalization process and refers to a specific way of thinking that generalises everything down to the level of economic relations in all situations and forms of social life.

Foucault has shown that neoliberal theory in particular makes it possible to provide 'a strictly economic interpretation of a whole domain previously thought to be non-economic' (Foucault 2008, 219). It is this, then, that makes possible the concept of human capital that comes from the work of neoliberal economists. It is a concept that observes human development through an economic grid and as a fundamental life perspective that 'generalize[s] the demand to act in an entrepreneurial manner' (Bröckling, Krasmann, and Lemke 2011, 25). We should note that with Slovakia's neoliberal turn, the concept of human capital has become increasingly palpable in education policy over the last 10 years. A discourse analysis of education policy documents in a number of European countries has indicated that '[i]n Slovakia, the influence of Human Capital Theory is more patent' (Gillies 2011, 232) than in the Czech Republic.

At the EU level, the political instrument associated with the mechanisms of the economisation of the social is the *Lisbon Strategy*. One of Slovakia's strong political conditions of EU accession was that it had to sign up to this strategy, which was implemented through the government's *Strategy for Developing Slovak Competitiveness up to 2010: National Lisbon Strategy* (Ministry of Finance of the Slovak Republic 2005). This was implemented along with the *Bologna Process* which Slovakia signed

up to before joining the EU and which is designed to construct a common European Higher Education Area. The aim was to unify (higher educational institutions and educational content) and improve transferability within this sector to enhance the EU's economic competitiveness and, in the Czech and Slovak Republics, to implement the EU's neoliberal agenda in higher education (Štech 2011). Pabian, Šima, and Kynčilová state (2011, 105) that in the post-communist Czech and Slovak Republics, the 'Bologna Process was used by the right-wing parliamentarians as an instrumental argument' in pursuit of neoliberal objectives to improve 'the accountability of HE institutions and their links to the market'. The strong interlinking of the Bologna Process with the Lisbon Strategy made for a typically post-communist political construct that differed from the tradition in western European countries that maintained a more diverse higher education sector.

The EC considers the European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System (ECTS) to be the central tool in the Bologna Process. It is through this system that the structure and content of higher education is harmonised with the aim of ensuring that educational outputs are comparable and ultimately so that the mobile workforce is easier to control. This system shapes the single education market, and as ECTS expert M. Sticchi Damiani states in the introduction of a promotional video on the EC website, 'ECTS credits have become the currency of European higher education'.

In transitional central Europe, the Bologna Process led to the strong restructuralisation of the higher education sector and via the introduction of ECTS substantial changes to the university curricula. The concept of the university and Humboldtian principles (autonomy, freedom, solitude and non-utilitarianism) to which Slovakia had returned had within the space of a few years been rejected once more. The incompatibility of the Bologna Process with Humboldtian principles is a central theme in academic discussions on universities in central Europe today (Pechar 2012) that concern the economising view of education and the normativity ensuing from the Bologna Process.

Hyper-regulation

Besides the generalisation of the economic perspective, the second important sign of neoliberalisation (in contradistinction to classical liberalisation) is the positive role of the state and/or centralised control in implementing this economisation. In practice, the consequence is the creation of 'a larger, more interventionist state' (Azar 2015, 95).

At the same time, the Lisbon Strategy and Bologna Process created mechanisms for greater intervention by EU institutions in the member states, mainly to monitor whether their higher education sectors and associated economic benefits can be controlled and measured (Keeling 2006). It is worth remembering that one of the consequences of the EU's current higher education policy is the 'dilution and eventual disappearance of the autonomy concept in the newer European documents' (Nokkala and Bacevic 2014, 709). The very notion of the autonomy of the university, the university administrations and academics is one that goes against the concept of universities that develop the knowledge economy of the EU and its member states. In principle, universities 'must be constructions of the state acting now in its positive role through the development of the techniques of *auditing*, *accounting* and *management*' (Olssen and Peters 2005, 315).

The push from the EU for neoliberal economisation through unifying mechanisms corresponds to the 'asymmetric multi-level governance' (Van Apeldoorn 2008, 26) model that is typical of the EU, in which issues concerning support for the market and competitiveness became central to the supranational European administration, while issues concerning social protection and equality remained mainly of concern to the national politicians of the various member states. Given that the way higher education operates is considered to be the fundamental instrument of neoliberal economization, the EU institutions make great efforts to influence this.

However, the post-communist EU member states are distinctive. The first wave of neoliberalisation hit them before they had joined the EU and took the form of 'economic 'shock therapy" typically found in 'peripheral neoliberal states' (Azar 2015, 98). Once Slovakia had entered the EU, it became one of the 'core neoliberal states' and as such underwent the 'engineering of society through the transformation of

institutions' (99). Naturally, as part of the multi-level governance of the EU, this led to changes in the nature of state interventions and to changes in the structure of state institutions. It did not, however, simply mean reducing the role of the state in favour of governance by the EU. In post-communist countries (Slovakia as well as the Czech Republic and Hungary), EU centralisation was accompanied by state centralisation and dirigisme. Neoliberalisation in these countries is therefore part of a 'hybrid regime' that relies on totalitarian mechanisms of social governance used in the past (Kolozova 2015). These countries are 'hybridized with democratic pluralism of the EU type, communism of twenty-first century China and, finally, with the 'competitive authoritarianism' of Eastern Europe' (Kolozova 2015, 13). The main technological component in this kind of governance is 'over-regulating legislation … coupled with draconic penalization which is abused for political pressure on companies, institutions (e.g. universities) and the society as a whole' (Kolozova 2015, 10).

It is this notion of the hybrid nature of Slovak policy that enables us to understand how it was possible for communist, post-communist and neoliberal forms of governance to coexist. Hybridisation became typical in Slovakia following independence in 1993 (Linde and Ekman 2011). It was based on an '… "unnatural" unity of the political model of liberal democracy, free market economy and a totalitarian state control' (Kolozova 2015, 7). Once Slovakia had entered the EU, the issue of state control became an increasingly debated topic, especially since, as in other post-communist countries, the electorate tended to support post-communist parties that favoured state interventionism and the defence of national interests (Gagyi 2016). Slovakia did not respond to the increased regulation from the EU by ceasing to develop its own legislative regulatory mechanisms; instead a tendency towards the hyper-regulation of all the key social levels became typical, reflecting the pro-interventionist atmosphere.

Over time, the accreditation procedures have become the tool for exercising this kind of extensive control over the higher education sector. They were introduced in the post-communist Czech and Slovak Republics at the beginning of the new millennium and were linked to the implementation of the Bologna Process, which was conducted via extensive reforms (new laws on higher education in both the Czech and Slovak Republics) that 'brought the state back into the centre of HE governance' (Pabian, Šima, and Kynčilová 2011, 105). Meanwhile, the state tightened its control of the higher education sector through its involvement in creating and approving the university boards. The funding criteria also began to change the emphasis on the way the work done by universities was recognised and thus the culture of universities began changing as well. There was a move away from educating and towards research and publishing, and in Slovakia there emerged a situation in which, as Kolozova (2015, 16) puts it, the ministry, through its funding procedures, 'openly favours a company (Thomson Reuters) which owns a base of academic journals'. Outputs published in this database receive the highest levels of funding. These changes signalled the end of the Humboldtian ideal of the university that had influenced the newly reconstituted higher education sector since the fall of communism. Its influence had been felt largely in terms of ideas but also in the relatively limited time period (5–10 years) for which it was in operation.

The era of this post-revolutionary re-building of a large section of the ideologically tainted humanities and social sciences, undertaken within the Humboldtian atmosphere, occurred was, however, too brief for the elements typically associated with academic cultures to be established, such as 'informal peer review within a collegiate system of control …' (Harley and Lee 1997; 1429). Hence, neoliberalisation began to penetrate through a scientific-matrix-based method of regulation involving the use of database entries (Mihăilescu 2016).

Thus, instead of seeing the state wield a diminished influence as part of accession to the EU, the post-communist countries have been witness to desires for strong state-centralised governance of the higher education sector; needless to say, this is all in the name of neoliberal goals. This can clearly be seen in the accreditation procedures that are supposed to ensure that the *Accreditation Commission of the Slovak Republic* is independent of the state. It is, however, well known that the way it is run, its strategic goals and membership are all under the significant influence of the Ministry of Education. In fact it is also one of the reasons for a conflict that emerged between Slovakia and the EU over the

commission's membership of the *Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education* (ENQA). To this day, the Accreditation Commission has not been accepted as a full member of ENQA precisely because of strong state influence over the way it operates. This lack of independence can be seen in the fact that decisions on university accreditation are signed and approved by the Minister of Education, and in Slovakia ministers have frequently not respected the decisions or recommendations made by the accreditation commission and have used their authority to intervene in the governance of the higher education sector.

In the post-socialist period even the accreditation procedures themselves gained this hyper-regulatory tendency. Following EU accession and the adoption of the Lisbon Strategy (which for political reasons was deliberately linked to the Bologna Process), the neoliberal notion of the university began to leave its distinctive mark on the accreditation procedures. Publications registered in the Thomson Reuters and Elsevier databases were the most heavily prioritised and one of the obligatory elements of running a higher education institution was that a particular management system had to be put in place. The TQM and EFQM models best reflect the rationality of a 'permanent economic tribunal' (Simons 2002) in education, so it comes as no surprise to find that, in the Slovak accreditation procedures (and criteria), implementation of these quality management models took on an authoritative character.

Case study and methodological considerations

This systemic and historical view of educational policies is of limited value if it is not set against the life world of the universities targeted by these neoliberal policies. It is only by looking at their implementation locally that we can shed light on the complex nature of the ties between the neoliberalisation processes and the communist and post-communist traditions. These processes are explored in a brief case study of a Slovak university which enables us to describe the institutional, communicational, technological and personal links with the neoliberalising processes and directly observe how the processes permeate the running of the organisation.

The case study is conducted using an insider perspective, since the person describing the running of the organisation and the changes introduced is also an employee of that organisation. Hence, the author of the study is a 'complete-member researcher' (Adler and Adler 1987). The use of the insider perspective for research purposes was devised by Brannick and Coghlan (2007) and refers to 'research by complete members of organizational systems in and on their own organizations' (59). The approach is founded on the fact that the researcher/staff member form a single entity. Since the 'insider' is both researcher and employee at the organisation, he is able to provide an engaged and experience-based view underpinned by personal participation in the life and rituals of the institution. The subjective engagement of the author brings this approach close to that of the personal narrative in which personal history has relatively important role to play (Ellis and Bochner 2000).

The advantages of this approach are that it can provide more in-depth and revealing data, and tacit and contextualising information (Dobson 2009). One issue with it is that it may result in role confusion and shared distinctiveness (Corbin Dwyer and Buckle 2009), in the sense that it makes stronger distinctions between employees or co-workers and those outside the community of employees ('us', i.e. academics versus 'them', i.e. university management, administration and so forth). Another potential complication is that it may lead to sensitive information being used and published, which could have a number of consequences including personal ones. These risks must be borne in mind by the researcher, and feature in this particular research as well. The faculty head is aware of the author's critical approach to university governance, which is why the author turned down the offer of a post on the faculty's senior management team (vice-dean), remaining head of department instead. The author's position then is one that tends towards 'shared distinctiveness'. The publishing of sensitive information was only an issue where the internal university system of staff assessments is concerned (see below, Portrait of a university), in which the department heads are continually warned not to publicise the way in which staff performances are calculated. The university considers this method to be part of

its know-how and hence is very proud of it. Equally academic staff at conferences, standing on the other side of the barricade, repeatedly warn against publicising these kinds of mechanisms. This is out of a concern that this model could be adopted by their own universities and be used to assess them.

The author of this study was one of the last students to be awarded his PhD prior to the restructuralisation of Slovak higher education as part of the Bologna Process. At that time his PhD studies were not yet considered to be the third cycle of university education with prescribed course units, since this model was not implemented until 2005 in Slovakia. The author therefore defended his PhD in the 'old' manner in front of the faculty research council and his PhD status was more one of academic and department member than student. A product of the brief post-communist Humboldtian era, and following his *habilitation*, he later became departmental head of school education at the university analysed below. He took up this managerial post at precisely the time when Slovak universities were undergoing their neoliberal transformation and implementing the new accreditation and evaluation criteria and hence joined the ranks of those reproducing the mechanism by which the transformation was implemented.

A variety of sources were used in the analysis that follows. They consist primarily of personal eye witness accounts based on a mixture of correspondence with various key players at the university, official university and ministry of education documents and internal correspondence, for example from emails addressed to the heads of departments. The documented changes to the culture of this Slovak university are also contextualised with parallel findings from abroad.

Portrait of a university

Trnava University at Trnava has a Jesuit tradition stretching back to 1635; however, at the end of the eighteenth century, it ceased to function for 215 years until being re-established in 1992, three years after the fall of communism and not quite one year before Slovak independence. Trnava University began operating once more in the midst of Slovakia's post-communist transition. In keeping with its history and the new conditions, Trnava University began to shape itself as a university for the humanities and social sciences, re-connecting to its Christian roots and with an important conservative mission. The university staff included a relatively large number of Christian academics who had been persecuted for their beliefs under communism or who had belonged to dissident movements. From its inception, the university attempted to establish itself as a fully autonomous environment for scholars, free from state interference, and seeking academic autonomy and a personal approach.

> We emphasise an *alumnorum cura personalis*, that is, genuine personal care for each individual student. Our goal is for every student who leaves Trnava University to be capable of making their own free decisions that are also autonomous and responsible. (Trnava University 2014)

Humboldt's ideal, reinstated following the collapse of communism, is the basic founding idea behind modern-day Trnava University; it is a founding idea which some department heads sought to employ in their attempts to put up a defence against the neoliberal model of the late 1990s, and also in their academic studies (e.g. Kascak, Pupala, and Petrova 2011; Šarkan and Nemec 2010).

They were responding to the changing governance of education predicated on a system of hyper-regulation and the Bologna Process used to cloak the higher education reforms undertaken in relation to the Lisbon Strategy, the amendments to the Higher Education Act, changes in the funding criteria, the introduction of new forms of accreditation and lastly the creation of an arena for the emergence of new regulatory mechanisms, such as agencies to assess and rank the various faculties and universities. The most important of these latter were the Academic Ranking and Rating Agency (ARRA), a member of the International Ranking Expert Group, and the Observatory on Academic Ranking and Excellence (IREG Observatory). OECD methodologies were used in assessments and, in Trnava University's case, we can observe how it has risen from being assessed as not very good in 2005 to being the university with the three best faculties in Slovakia in 2014, out of its total of five.

This 'success' is down to a new type of engagement adopted by some faculties, particularly since the millennium, whereby they have begun to depart from their Humboldtian identity; this applies to some faculties and the university as a whole. Initially these faculties were motivated by the national funding criteria, which led to significant funding cuts for teaching and increased funding for publications listed in certain international databases. Given that financial gains were now calculated according to certain kinds of performance, a preference emerged at the management level for a different kind of faculty member than had previously been the case. The strongest positions were awarded to accountants, clerks and managers rather than academics. As Collyer (2015, 329) has shown, with the neoliberalisation of the university sphere the 'administrative field' not only acquire greater importance but are 'increasingly able to intervene in academic matters …'.

New regulatory elements within the internal university culture have been implemented by the actors in this field. Those who have acquired new competencies and substantial power at Trnava University are the faculty secretaries with financial backgrounds, who create new models of how best the faculty can make a profit. Clerks like these from the Faculty of Pedagogy have been responsible for creating the model for Trnava University. The model calculates the financial performance (and gain) for each academic at the university. It includes the financial gain of each academic (in relation to the state funding in the faculty budget) from teaching (in relation to number of students taught) and from scientific publications (in funding for premium publications and projects). The calculations are submitted to the department head annually in table format, showing in one column the financial gain generated by the academic the previous year and in the second column the 'costs', i.e. annual salary. The final column shows the difference between the financial gain and the annual salary, so the staff member's line manager can see whether that member is in the red or the black, i.e. whether he or she has produced a profit or 'loss' for the faculty. The line manager is then supposed to inform the management of this, point out any insufficiencies and take action as appropriate.

Academic faculty members are seen purely as producers of economic capital, as an example of the 'homo oeconomicus' described by Foucault (2008) in his analysis of neoliberalism. Workers of this kind have now come to dominate the faculty and one can now see that a 'permanent economic tribunal' (247) governs the faculty. The key conduit for this is the head of department. Senior management regularly receive information on the amount of funding obtained in the year, so they can, for instance, guide junior members over which periodicals are appropriate to publish in and which are not. For instance, the department heads received the following email from the education faculty secretary with the subject line 'costs of publication':

> Dear head of department,
>
> Following yesterday's meeting with the dean, I am sending you the following information: 'funding' (column G) for publications as part of the 2015 budget – please note that this 'funding' attracts social and healthcare insurance payments. The grant must be divided by 1.352. I have also added various highlighted publication categories.

For illustration, we can also state that publication of an article in a journal listed in the Web of Science database, under Current Contents, supplied the Trnava University budget with €5439 in 2015, while an article listed in Scopus brought €2558.

The head of department is therefore forced to adopt this perspective in assessing staff members and to calculate the financial progress made by the unit as a whole. This places academics under enormous pressure, further added to by the appearance of yet more bureaucratic assessment procedures that have to be performed in relatively short intervals, annually at least, but often every semester (Collyer 2015). This kind of economising regulation is not considered to be sufficient. Other forms are emerging as part of the concept of hyper-regulation. Not only do staff become their 'own confessor[s]' (Fejes 2008) as they familiarise themselves with the tables indicating the financial gain they have produced along with the termly assessments of their students, but once a year they also have to submit 'a career statement', in which they outline their academic career plans, and produce a 'personal plan' of their academic research and artistic activities each semester detailing their compulsory publishing activities for the following semester. This is a new method of prospective planning. The outputs and assessments

then affect their contracts for the next period and level of remuneration, which is re-assessed annually. Thus, we can agree with Shore (2010, 21) that '[t]his new rationality of governance has brought a raft of new auditing techniques aimed at instilling into academia habits of competition and *self*-discipline through the continual monitoring of performance …'. In Europe, today we can see the global convergence in the methods used to continually monitor academic staff performances (see Berg, Huijbens, and Larsen 2016).

Just as the debates in traditional neoliberal areas indicate that academic staff 'visibly struggle with the task of becoming appropriate(d) neo-liberal subjects' (Davies, Gottsche, and Bansel 2006, 313), staff at post-communist neoliberal universities face similar battles. Linkova (2014) has for instance shown that the situation is similar in the Czech Republic, where in 2009 neoliberal reforms to the annual research assessment provoked a wave of dissatisfaction that led to mass protests amongst academics. In Slovakia, politically more inclined towards economic liberalism, such protests did not occur. The fact that Trnava University has traditionally had its own conservative mission was of no importance in this case. Indeed, it pursues this mission in tandem with the economisation of the university as a whole, in much the same way as neoliberalisation has taken place in conservative Christian universities all over the world (Burke 2012).

The new hyper-regulatory elements (including those at system level and at internal university level) have led to the adoption of the logic of competitiveness amongst higher education institutions The idea that universities and colleges should compete amongst themselves is also encouraged by the fact that in assessing publications produced at colleges and universities, teams of authors from different universities have been penalised with authorship being divided up amongst them. For Slovak, and also Czech universities (Linkova 2014), it has become more advantageous to publish alone in competition against other universities. At many meetings involving faculty leaders, departmental leaders at Trnava University were warned against recommending their members to publish work alongside authors from other Slovak universities. Trnava University has begun to develop and grow a culture that is typical of 'striving universities' (O'Meara 2007), i.e. universities that seek to make rapid and substantial progress on the performance indicators and gain advantage over other universities (Gonzales, Martinez, and Ordu 2014). Trnava University's Christian mission of conserving the past, its stability and conferring this on the students in the form of personal care now lies in contradiction to the new dynamics and rapid change.

Trnava University's attempts to increase its symbolic value (via international acceptation) have led to it applying for ECTS and the Diploma Supplement Labels, honorary distinctions that are awarded by the European Commission. Trnava University was the first Slovak university specialising in the social sciences and humanities to receive the award, bringing it competitive advantage. The culture of striving has led to a number of new university documents that reflect this attempt to regulate university culture more robustly by means of 'over-regulating legislation' (Kolozova 2015, 10). Action plan cultures are typically found in neoliberal 'regimes of performance' (Morrissey 2015). Thus at Trnava University, an *Action Plan for Improvement* was introduced, stipulating the growth rates to be achieved by the university on certain performance indicators for the years 2014, 2015 and 2016. For example, an annual five per cent growth rate was set for the number of publications listed in the favoured databases. The new managerial culture is implemented through the following policies: Guidelines issued by the rector of Trnava University at Trnava no. 1/2014 on achieving quality in higher education at Trnava University at Trnava and Instructions issued by the dean of the Pedagogy Faculty of Trnava University at Trnava for achieving quality in higher education at the Faculty of Pedagogy of Trnava University at Trnava. These govern the implementation of the CAF (Common Assessment Framework) quality management system which is a 'total quality management tool developed by the public sector for the public sector, inspired by the Excellence Model of the European Foundation for Quality Management (EFQM)' (European CAF Resource Centre 2013, 9). As in other striving universities (Evans 2011, 218), these quality policies are implemented as 'detailed authoritative directives', while concepts such as education, learning, knowledge are pushed into the background. The terminology includes words such as 'assess' and 'evaluate', and most frequently 'observe' and 'monitor'. Distrust of staff is a typical

feature of neoliberal universities (Shore 2010). It is symptomatic that these policies hail not from the ranks of academics but from clerks at the various administrative departments. In order to ensure whole-faculty convergence in the new quality system, the university established the *Quality Assurance Council of the Pedagogy Faculty of Trnava University at Trnava*, comprising the head of faculty and all the department heads.

The culture of the new quality systems is now ever-present in the awarding of certificates and emblems. The neoliberal ideas captured within the policies referred to above were put into practice at Trnava University through a visual campaign. Policy implementation was accompanied by the placing of symbols of the new academic culture throughout the university premises until saturation was achieved. The neoliberal obsession with certificates (Munene 2013) led first of all to copies of the ECTS and Diploma Supplement Labels certificates being posted on faculty notice boards and distributed in meeting rooms. Two print versions of the Action Plan for Improvement were produced: large posters were hung on the faculty doors and walls (in all the corridors and on all the entrance doors) and smaller self-standing ones, not unlike desk-top calendars, were distributed to every member of staff (from secretary to professor) for them to install on their desks. The action plan, a symbol of the new neoliberal culture, thus entered the visual field of all the common areas in the public sphere but also in the private workspaces of every staff member. These symbols were not to be shared simply as part of a collective identity but also as a constant reflection of all staff members, influencing their self-reflections, self-direction and self-discipline. They were intended to be an imaginary pointing finger, warning of the need to publish faster and keep an eye on the CAF quality indicators etc. The introduction of the culture of new symbols was also launched through the official letterhead used by all staff members. The head of department received the following email from the faculty secretary:

> Dear Head of Department, Girls,
>
> Trnava University at Trnava has been awarded the internationally recognised Effective CAF User certificate as part of its implementation of the quality management system and so is authorised, for the two years that the certificate is valid, to use the logo on all its outcome documents.
>
> Please ensure that you do so.
>
> You will find a sample letterhead attached.

Of particular interest is the way in which the various key players are addressed in the salutation. It creates a single bureaucratic community regardless of whether the person concerned holds an important academic post (head of department) or has an administrative post ('girls'). In this sense, the culture is one of administrative equality.

The cast

The intended efforts of the senior administrators who opted for this kind of campaign were clear: to get the disparate body of academic staff under the wings of the new regulation, to sign up to the new direction and ensure that the new culture would be broadly accepted. Campaigns of this nature are just one of the many standard neoliberal technologies available. Tesar (2013b), for example, describes how as a lecturer at a university in New Zealand, he was witness to how every staff member received an email with the statement 'PBRF is essential to our University, and it is important that we hire professors to score highly' with the instructions that it should be printed out and hung on their office doors. This is similar to the requirement at Trnava University for staff to place the action plan on their desks. Tesar quite rightly states that 'the meaning of his [the staff member's] actions lies not in the slogan but in the performative aspect of responding to the request' (77). What is of particular interest though is the position of Tesar himself. He is in his 40s, has Czechoslovak roots and experienced the communist era before taking up a post at a neoliberal university in New Zealand. His personal witness account of the neoliberalisation processes implemented at his university led him to employ an analytical tool used by dissidents to analyse communist governance. Both kinds of message, it seemed, could be

analysed by this critical concept. The tool was Havel's concept of social auto-totality: '[b]y making all academics participate, the University then produces everyone as instruments of a mutual totality, or the auto-totality of society' (Tesar 2013b, 79).

The attempt to create a social auto-totality has had various effects, as in both the Czech example and at Trnava University: '[o]verall, researchers are showing adaptation to the new types of governmentality' (Linkova 2014; 86). Those who are most malleable are the young academics. Many of them still even display the Trnava University action plan on their desks. Thus, they declare their allegiance to the new culture, frequently discussing the assessment criteria, types of publication and so forth. The young academics display elements of a neoliberal academic identity (Archer 2008), primarily because they are the most vulnerable and the least well protected in the university sector (Petersen 2009). A number of them frequently contact the administrative staff responsible for instituting the new culture with questions regarding reports and assessments.

Many of their older colleagues, primarily senior lecturers and professors, immediately disposed of the action plans; indeed, in some cases the secretary in question dared not send them the package in the first place. Generally, however, resistance was not particularly manifest and the new academic culture became the subject of behind-the-scenes discussions instead. Parallels were drawn comparing the new forms of neoliberal governance with communist ones. The action plans became symbolic of the parallels. Those who identified with the Humboldtian mission of Trnava University primarily discussed two of these. The first was that the notion of planning several years ahead and fulfilling ever higher targets that had been typical of communist central planning. This had consisted of cyclical planning like the five-year plans that were to be found in higher education as well (e.g. Pașca 2014). These Trnava University staff members often rather mockingly referred to the Action Plan for Improvement as the Trnava University Five-Year Plan. The second parallel concerned the way in which the action plans were promoted. The massive campaign was propagated via notice boards and posters. Regardless to say, these had played, albeit in a hypertrophied form (excessively decorated in communist symbols and slogans), their own extremely important role in communist propaganda. Not only had they been part of the general school culture under communism (Segľová 2006), but they had also represented the elaborate use of symbols in public institutions and in public and private spheres alike (Cholínský 2014). For this reason, the use of agitation of this nature at Trnava University was unacceptable to some of the critics.

Despite the fact that these staff members rejected the performance practices linked to the campaign behind the new culture, their working habits gradually began to change primarily in relation to the economisation of their work at the faculty in the form of prioritised outputs. After all, it was on this basis that the university judged how important they were to it. The neoliberal culture thus began to take on such a complex face that to radically question it became problematic. Thus, the idea that '[a]cademics' desire to critique and to *undo* some aspects of neoliberalism are intricately enmeshed with their *doing* of neoliberalism' (Davies and Petersen 2005, 35) also holds true for the Humboldtians at Trnava University.

The neoliberals at Trnava University – senior administrators, managers and accountants – have all been strengthening their positions. They draw up all the important policy strategies, presenting them to department heads at meetings where the discourse is dominated by financial and technical issues. In many universities in Slovakia, the tendency has been for a certain overlap between neoliberal administrators and former communist functionaries (most frequently from the communist youth movement) or academics who collaborated with the communist secret services. This, however, is not the case at Trnava University where the staff composition and links to Christian dissident roots have prevented any significant infiltration of former communists into the administration. Elsewhere though, some of them have even become university rectors and openly promote a neoliberal academic culture or in some cases build up their academic careers by propagating such a culture. This kind of totality, promoted by the new culture seems to attract those who see an exclusively centralistic, controlling, bureaucratic and administrative field as being crucial for social governance. In the contemporary post-communist era, many of these apologetics are still to be found.

Outlook

The hypothesis seems to apply, particularly if we consider studies conducted in post-communist countries that point to a convergence between neoliberal governmentality and communist forms of governance. Thus far, this convergence has mainly been documented in relation to post-communist China, which is undergoing an extremely radical neoliberalisation. The radicalness is a consequence of the fact that the current neoliberal measures find support in China's pre-communist (Confucian culture), communist and post-communist (sushi discourse) cultures (Kipnis 2007, 2008; Woronov 2008). Kipnis (2008, 276) states that many of the measures adopted as part of the education reforms are viewed by Chinese teachers as being associated more with the Confucian tradition and communist past rather than with contemporary neoliberal policies. This perception stems from the technological overlap between these kinds of governance, which are dominated by a prevailingly authoritative administrative field (Collyer 2015) and hyper-regulation. This can be considered to be specific to all post-communist countries including Slovakia. The affinity for a strong administrative field, through which centralist postcommunist neoliberal policies operate and which is strongly in evidence in all post-communist countries, is palpable in Slovakia.

If we link back to the introductory section on the permeation of communist forms of governance in Czechoslovakia, and place them in the context of post-communist neoliberalisation as illustrated by the university case study, we see the different levels of overlap between the communist and the neoliberal. This overlap is created by the fostering and implementation of very similar structural conditions in which the universities operate. The permeation of communist and neoliberal forms of governance was accompanied by a strengthening of state regulation both in terms of the regulatory bodies of the universities and in terms of university funding. Under communism we see a more direct influence over the appointing of staff members, while in the neoliberal university we see a similar influence being exerted by the state regulated accreditation procedures (which ultimately lead to the influence of personnel). In both cases, we can observe the weakening influence of the academic staff and of the professoriate on the running of the universities via the introduction of an extensive administrative culture in which the deciding power in many areas is transferred to the new non-academic layer. In practice in both cases, the result is the formulation of long-term prescriptive normative planning documents dictating staff policies and the governance of the university. One system was dominated by five-year plans and the other by a culture of action plans. The fact that senior staff compile personal reports on staff members further down the hierarchy is another shared element of administrative policy between the two systems. The methods used to visually propagate and emblematise the new university culture also have much in common, and install parallel cultures of administrative equality. In the prevailingly administrative field, everyone is equal, from 'esteemed comrade' to head of department to 'girls'. In each of these elements one can find continuity with the hyper-regulatory tendency.

The brief Humboldtian post-communist era ushered in a weakening of this tendency and changed the face of communist universities; however, a structural element remained that would significantly affect the permeation of neoliberal forms of governance. If it had not been for this element, the new neoliberalisation pressures exerted on the Slovak university sector by the OECD and EC could not have had such a direct and effective impact. The element concerned is the retention of the Soviet university-department structural link. It is the reason, one cannot simply state that the Humboldtian tradition was completely reinstated in the post-communist era. If we now return to the case study of Trnava University, we can clearly see how fundamental were the communication and intervention channels used by the neoliberal faculty management, comprising the dean, the vice-dean and the faculty secretaries. The conduit is the head of department who has no decision-making powers on strategic issues of faculty governance and does not produce any key documents but who does have power over staffing and decides the composition of the unit or department. Clearly, though, the criteria set out by faculty management, and used to assess the work units, enter into the personnel assessments of staff. The heads of department are moreover subjected to pressure from above and resistance from below. The extent to which the new culture is implemented therefore depends on their ability to deal with

these two tensions. In the post-communist era, this means it is largely determined by the academic profile and personal identities of the head of department. Former communist, dissident, modern-day Humboldtian and neoliberal academic – these are all personal histories that lead to different methods of handling matters. The structural segmentation of the universities, introduced in the early days of communism, fostered a high degree of susceptibility to influence. This was made possible by the ideological unity typical in the communist era. Under neoliberalism this also affected members of collective bodies such as the Quality Assurance Council.

Today Slovakia finds itself in a situation in which the university sector, which has not been thoroughly cleansed of its communist identification, is undergoing strong neoliberalisation. These are atypical bedfellows, but it would appear that they make for a strong partnership. Identification with the Humboldtian notion of the university, which forms the core of a strong autonomy and resistance to centralised prescriptionism, has led academics in post-communist countries to point to analogies between the processes of neoliberalisation and the totalitarian forms of governance from the communist era. It has led them to debate dissident approaches to analysing society, such as Václav Havel's concept of social auto-totality or that of the subversive university or the underground university, i.e. the notion of a completely independent (including economically), autonomous university as a community of intellectuals, like the one Jan Patočka once strived for amidst persecution by the communist authorities (Tesar 2013a). It is still possible to find the odd academic in the Czech Republic who attended Patočka's home seminars. When I last discussed this with one of these academics, Jaroslav Koťa from Charles University, Prague, we concurred that the dissident and Humboldtian legacy had not developed sufficiently in the post-communist era, and consequently the university sector was subjected to rapid neoliberalisation. Cultivating the university sector in the post-communist era presents a long-term challenge.

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Notes on contributor

Ondrej Kascak is an associate professor in the Department of School Education at the Trnava University. His research focuses on an analysis of neoliberal governmentalities within the post-communist contexts. He is the lead editor of the *Journal of Pedagogy*.

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